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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 000555

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECIN](#) [MO](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: ALGERIANS ON MOROCCAN RAPPROCHEMENT EFFORT: CURB  
YOUR ENTHUSIASM

REF: A. RABAT 401

[B](#). RABAT 417

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: While expressing general support for dialogue and rapprochement in principle, Algerian officials from the Customs service to Prime Minister Belkhadem have voiced frustration at what they perceive as the unilateral and non-consultative manner in which Morocco launched its recent initiative to reopen the borders between the two nations. Deep suspicion remains about Moroccan motives, particularly as the timing of the latest initiative coincided with public U.S. and French backing for the Moroccan autonomy plan for the Western Sahara. Contacts at Belkhadem's National Liberation Front (FLN) tell us that the PM's April 27 visit to Tangier was a positive event, but that the road towards a real Maghreb Union is a long one they would be reluctant to travel without a change in Moroccan behavior. End Summary.

"WHERE DID THIS CALL COME FROM?"  
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[1](#)2. (C) Asked why Algeria rejected Morocco's call to reopen the land border between the two countries, Belkhadem stated to the press on May 11 that he "did not know where that call came from." Parliamentary VP and FLN old-timer Mohamed Seghir Kara told us May 11 that the Moroccan initiative took the Algerian government by surprise and "brought back memories of the unilateral manner" in which Morocco closed the two countries' shared land border in 1994. Belkhadem went on to tell the press that Algeria felt abandoned and isolated in the 1990s, when a UNSC blockade was imposed on it and airlines could not fly into or out of the country. At that time, he said, Algeria should have received help from its neighbors and instead was sealed off further when Morocco accused Algeria of involvement in terror attacks in Marrakech, then imposed visa rules on Algerians and closed the border. Belkhadem concluded that "joint committees" should be reactivated as a first step to discuss smuggling, drugs and illegal immigration.

[1](#)3. (C) During a May 13 meeting, MFA Deputy Director for Multilateral Affairs Abdelmalek Bouheddou told us that the MFA's official position was the one voiced by Belkhadem. Bouheddou said that he and his colleagues had no objection to rapprochement in general, but doubted the sincerity of this initiative due to the manner in which the Moroccans presented it. Privately, Bouheddou expressed a view that many of our contacts have shared with us -- that empirically they see Morocco as a country that "has trouble with every single one

of its neighbors except the Atlantic Ocean." He referred to differences with Spain over Ceuta and Melilla, tensions with Algeria, the Western Sahara dispute, and even a diplomatic row with Senegal earlier this year over Western Sahara that resulted in a mutual recall of ambassadors.

MOROCCAN BEHAVIOR "INSULTING"

14. (C) FLN Spokesperson Said Bouhedja told us on May 12 that his party supported the reopening of the border in principle, ultimately aspiring "to establish a union of the Maghreb peoples." He noted, however, that progress depended upon a decision by the leaders of the region to settle "outstanding issues" that affect the aspirations of the Maghreb peoples, with the first of those issues being the Western Sahara dispute. Bouhedja stressed that the Western Sahara remained a major obstacle to the formation of a true Maghreb Union, reiterating Algeria's support for decolonization under the auspices of the UN. Bouhedja, like Kara a day earlier, said that Moroccan statements and actions were "unilateral" and "inconsistent with democratic principles," as Morocco sought to use the media to deliver a message rather than accepted official channels.

PALPABLE SUSPICION ON THE GROUND

15. (C) While Belkhadem's high-profile visit to Tangier made headlines here, it remains difficult for us to secure Algerian participation in programs in Morocco at the working

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level. We tried repeatedly with several ministries and sub-agencies, especially the Algerian Customs service, to line up Algerian participants for a transshipment conference in Tangier. The Director of Cooperation at Customs told us this week that they would not send anyone to a conference in Morocco because things had "heated up" between Algerian Customs and its Moroccan counterpart. He hinted that while the Moroccans publicly called for a reopening of the border, the reality on the ground was that the border had recently grown more tense, and did not want to expose Algerian customs officials to "harassing behavior" on the part of the Moroccans.

16. (C) COMMENT: Clearly the status of bilateral relations between Morocco and Algeria depends on where you stand. With Algerian principles offended by recent Western Sahara developments they see as favoring Morocco, and with their pride wounded by Morocco's "unilateral" (and uncomfortably public) call to reopen the border, genuine rapprochement appears distant for the moment. Old-school FLN regulars like Kara and Belkhadem are quick to proclaim the principle that Morocco and Algeria represent "one people" with shared histories and values, but Algerian "principles" present major obstacles to steps forward when the Algerians feel they have not been consulted or otherwise rubbed the wrong way. Bouhedja's suggestion that Morocco, by going public with its border initiative, was using the media to make itself look good at Algeria's expense was echoed by Kara as well.

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